

HIGH-TECH GENOCIDE

More than four million people have died in central Africa in a war over coltan (short for columbite-tantalite), a heat-resistant mineral ore widely used in cellphones, laptops and other high-tech electronics.

Tantalum extracted from the ore is used to make tantalum capacitors—tiny components that are essential in managing the flow of current in electronic devices. Eighty per cent of the world's coltan is found in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This mountainous jungle area is the battleground of what has been grimly dubbed "Africa's First World War", pitting Congolese forces against those of six neighbouring countries and numerous armed factions. The victims are mostly civilians; starvation and disease have killed hundreds of thousands, and the fighting has displaced two million people from their homes.

Often dismissed as just an ethnic war, the conflict is actually a battle over the natural resources that are sought by foreign corporations: diamonds, tin, copper, gold and, most of all, coltan. At stake for the heavily armed militias and governments is a cut of the high-tech boom of the 1990s, in which the price of coltan skyrocketed to nearly \$300 per pound.

(Source: Earth First! Journal, vol. 26, no. 1, Samhain/Yule 2005, website <http://www.earthfirstjournal.org>)



PREPARING FOR MARTIAL LAW?

A Halliburton subsidiary has just received a US\$385 million contract from the Department of Homeland Security to provide "temporary detention and processing capabilities".

The contract—announced on 24 January by the engineering and construction firm KBR—calls for preparing for "an emergency influx of immigrants, or to support the rapid development of new programs" in the event of other emergencies, such as "a natural disaster". The release offered no details about where Halliburton was to build these facilities, or when.

But almost no paper so far has discussed

the possibility that detention centres could be used to detain American citizens if the Bush administration were to declare martial law.

"Almost certainly this is preparation for a roundup after the next 9/11 for Mid-Easterners, Muslims and possibly dissenters," says Daniel Ellsberg, a former military analyst who in 1971 released the Pentagon Papers, the US military's account of its activities in Vietnam.

"They've already done this on a smaller scale, with the 'special registration' detentions of immigrant men from Muslim countries, and with Guantánamo."

Plans for detention facilities or camps have a long history, going back to fears in the 1970s of a national uprising by black militants.

Last September, NORTHCOM conducted its highly classified *Granite Shadow* exercise in Washington, DC. As William Arkin reported in the *Washington Post* [25 September], "...*Granite Shadow* is yet another new Top Secret and compartmented operation related to the military's extra-legal powers regarding weapons of mass destruction. It allows for emergency military operations in the United States without civilian supervision or control."

(Source: by Peter Dale Scott, Pacific News, 1 Feb 2006, via http://www.ocnus.net/artman/publish/printer_22660.shtml)

CALL FOR PREHISTORY CHRONOLOGY TO BE REVISED

Dan Smail, a mediaevalist who joined Harvard's history department in January, is a time revolutionary. Historians, Professor Smail says, are in thrall to a chronology of the human race that is now embarrassingly out of date. He wants to move the starting date in introductory history courses back 100,000 years or so.

According to the history books, civilisation as we know it had its first stirrings in the Fertile Crescent around 4000 to 6000 BC. But as Smail points out in an article in the latest issue of the *American Historical Review*, when you consider recent (and not-so-recent) discoveries in archaeology, anthropology and biology—the finding that all humankind can be traced to Africa, for



"The oil crisis is really starting to suck."

example, or that humans were on the march out of that continent by roughly 100,000 BC, not to mention good guesses for when language, hunting and farming arose—the fixation on a starting date of 4000 to 6000 BC begins to seem awfully arbitrary.

And yet, as Smail goes on to argue in his essay (suggestively titled "In the Grip of Sacred History"), this chronological tick has a very interesting back story.

"Every history curriculum in secondary schools and colleges that tacitly accepts a Near Eastern origin around 6,000 years ago," Professor Smail writes, "contains the unintended echo of the Judeo-Christian mythology of the special creation of man in the Garden of Eden."

Through the 18th century and well into the 19th, Western historians, almost all of them Christian, thought that humankind (and Earth) dated to roughly 4000 to 7000 BC. And many thought that the Garden of Eden could be traced to the Fertile Crescent.

Smail's theory is that, in the 19th century, as the biblical timeline lost credibility and the staggering age of the Earth began to be glimpsed, historians reflexively clung to as much of the traditional timeline as they could. A true reckoning with the long timelines envisioned by Darwin never occurred.

(Source: The Boston Globe, 26 February 2006, <http://www.boston.com>)

HOUSEHOLD DEBT HASTENS MOVE TO GLOBAL CURRENCY?

The world's top central banking authority has warned that the Bank of England's inflation-busting tactics are largely responsible for the dangerous pile-up of household debt in Britain, which last year passed £1,158 billion, £30 billion more than the country's total economic output.

The powerful Bank for International Settlements (BIS) has voiced grave doubts about the policy and called on politicians to begin debating an overhaul of the current global economic system.

In another radical move, it has also suggested ditching many national currencies in favour of a small number of formal currency blocks based on the dollar, euro and renminbi or yen.

The BIS, which is controlled by a coalition of central banks and helps oversee the global financial system, warned that by pushing interest rates so

low, inflation-targeting has encouraged the public to take on more debt and has accelerated a flow of money out of the world's major economies. For example, the US current account deficit is at a record level of almost seven per cent of the country's economic output, meaning an unprecedented amount of money is flowing out of the country.

BIS's leading economist and head of monetary policy, Mr William White, said: "Those countries with the biggest external deficits [the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand] also tend to have the biggest internal imbalances. Rising asset prices in such countries (recently, for housing in particular) have led to higher perceptions of wealth, and more spending."

However, he added, far from managing these worrying build-ups, inflation-targeting can encourage them.

(Source: The Telegraph, UK, 20 February 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk>)

CHEMOTHERAPY IMPROVES SURVIVAL BY ONLY 2.3%

An Australian study (*Clin Oncol* 2004; 16:549-60) suggests the benefits of chemotherapy have been oversold.

Based on the calculations in the study, the contribution of chemotherapy to adult survival from cancer was estimated to be 2.3% in Australia and 2.1% in the USA. The authors, two of whom are radiation oncologists but one of whom is a practising professor of medical oncology, concluded that "chemotherapy only makes a minor contribution to cancer survival" and that "to justify the continued funding

and availability of drugs used in cytotoxic chemotherapy, a rigorous evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and impact on quality of life is urgently required".

Associate Professor Michael Boyer of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, raised concerns about the methodology of the study and the fact that "if you start... saying how much does chemotherapy add in the people that you might actually use it [in], the numbers start creeping up...to five or six per cent".

(Source: Australian Prescriber, vol. 29, nos 2-3, 2006, www.australianprescriber.com)

NEW LAKES FOUND BENEATH ANTARCTIC ICE

More than 140 lakes lie buried beneath varying thicknesses of Antarctic ice, but most of them are small and shallow says Michael Studinger, a geophysicist at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory in Palisades, New York. Lake Vostok, discovered decades ago, is the largest.

Now, Studinger and his colleagues have used a collage of data to depict two large subglacial lakes near Lake Vostok.

Ice-penetrating-radar data gathered during aerial surveys indicate that the upper surfaces of these lakes lie beneath four kilometres of ice. The lakes in some places are about 900 metres deep.

"This is an important discovery," says University of Hawaii oceanographer David Karl. "It shows how little we know about the Earth around us."

(Source: Science News Online, 4 February 2006, <http://www.sciencenews.org/articles/20060204/fob6.asp>)



"... and that cloud looks just like a mushroom."

RUSSIAN ASTRONOMER PREDICTS "MINI ICE-AGE"

A Russian astronomer has predicted that Earth will experience a "mini ice-age" in the middle of this century, caused by low solar activity.

Khabibullo Abduasamatov of the Pulkovo Astronomic Observatory in St Petersburg says that temperatures will begin falling six or seven years from now, when global warming caused by increased solar activity in the 20th century reaches its peak, RIA Novosti reported. The coldest period will occur 15 to 20 years after a major solar output decline—between 2035 and 2045, Abduasamatov said.

Dramatic changes in the Earth's surface temperatures are an ordinary phenomenon, not an anomaly, he said, and result from variations in the Sun's energy output and ultraviolet radiation.

The northern hemisphere's most recent cool-down period occurred between 1645 and 1705. The resulting period, known as the "Little Ice Age", left canals in the Netherlands frozen solid and forced people in Greenland to abandon their houses to glaciers, the scientist said.

(Sources: RIA Novosti, Russia, via UPI, 7 February 2006, <http://www.upi.com>)

UK McDONALD'S IN TROUBLE

At last, it seems that McDonald's is losing its hitherto stellar domination of the vast fast-food market in the UK. This is not a regional or temporary blip, or a mere tactical realignment. It really is in trouble. Falling sales have forced the

closure of 25 McDonald's branches. Its poor performance in Britain dragged profit margins from McDonald's European company-owned restaurants down to 14.9% of sales last year, from 15.6% in 2004. No new openings are planned for the coming year.

Even McDonald's European boss, Denis Hennequin, is struggling to put a happy face on the situation: "The UK has been in negative territory for a couple of years now," he admitted. "The brand 15 years ago was very trendy and modern. It is now tired."

There is little doubt that the effects of the McLibel trial involving Helen Steel and Dave Morris coupled with Morgan Spurlock's well-watched *Super Size Me* documentary have contributed significantly to McDonald's decline in popularity.

(Source: by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, The Guardian, UK, 4 March 2006)

MI6 PAYS OUT OVER SECRET LSD MIND-CONTROL TESTS

The British intelligence service MI6 has paid thousands of pounds in compensation to servicemen who were fed LSD without their consent in secret mind-control experiments in the 1950s.

MI6 has agreed to an out-of-court settlement with the men, who said they were duped into taking part in the experiments and had waited years to learn the truth. The men experienced vivid hallucinogenic trips when given the drugs. MI6 is also paying the cost of the men's lawsuit, which alleged assault.

The LSD experiments were conducted in 1953 and 1954 by scientists working for MI6 who were trying to discover a "truth drug" to compel prisoners to confess.

MI6's counterparts at the CIA also did LSD experiments on men without their knowledge to try to control their minds. Both agencies finally concluded that LSD could not be used to manipulate people.

(Source: The Guardian, 24 February 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk>)

NEW MOUSE ORGAN RAISES QUESTIONS OVER LAB STUDIES

After a century of scrutinising the laboratory mouse, one might imagine that scientists would know the creature's body like the back of their own hands. However, German researchers now say they have discovered a whole new organ.

Common knowledge holds that in mice, the thymus—the pinkish-grey lump of tissue that helps to produce the infection-fighting T cells of the immune system—is roughly the size of a pea and nestles in the chest above the heart.

Hans-Reimer Rodewald and colleagues at the University of Ulm say they have discovered a smaller, second thymus hidden in the neck of lab mice. "I couldn't believe it for the first couple of months," Rodewald says. The year 2006 is "not the time that you expect to change anatomy".

The discovery raises questions about immunology studies in mice. Rodewald suggests that these studies may need to be re-examined.

"Some people are not going to like this," he adds.

(Source: Nature, 2 March 2006, <http://www.nature.com/news/2006/060227/ful1/060227-9.html>)

PHYSICS PROFESSOR SAYS EXPLOSIVES TOPPLED WTC

The physics of 9/11—including how fast and symmetrically one of the World Trade Center buildings fell—prove that official explanations of the collapses are wrong, says Brigham Young University physics professor Steven E. Jones.

In fact, it's likely that there were "pre-positioned explosives" in all three buildings at ground zero, he says.

In a paper posted online and accepted for peer-reviewed publication, Jones adds his voice to those of previous sceptics, including the authors of the website <http://www.wtc7.net>, whose research Jones quotes. Jones's article can be found at



<http://www.physics.byu.edu/research/energy/htm7.html>.

Jones, who conducts research in fusion and solar energy at BYU, is calling for an independent, international scientific investigation "guided not by politicized notions and constraints but rather by observations and calculations".

"It is quite plausible that explosives were pre-planted in all three buildings and set off after the two plane crashes—which were actually a diversion tactic," he writes.

"Muslims are (probably) not to blame for bringing down the WTC buildings after all," Jones adds.

As for speculation about who might have planted the explosives, Jones says: "I don't usually go there. There's no point in doing that until we do the scientific investigation."

Previous investigations, including those of FEMA, the 9/11 Commission and NIST (the National Institute of Standards and Technology), ignored the physics and chemistry of what happened on September 11, 2001, to the Twin Towers and the 47-storey building known as WTC7, he says.

The official explanation—that fires caused structural damage that caused the buildings to collapse—can't be backed up by either testing or history, he says.

(Source: Deseret Morning News, 10 November 2005, <http://deseretnews.com>)

PRE-PACKAGED MEATS DOSED TO LOOK "ROSIER"

Supermarkets are trimming out their in-store butchers and buying pre-packaged cuts direct from the processing plants. The increasingly widespread use of "modified atmosphere packaging" replaces the oxygen inside with other gases, especially carbon monoxide. Doing so makes the meat "rosier".

Customers buy meat mainly on how it looks. Better-looking meat has a longer purchasability.

Among the bigger supermarkets reported to be carrying the treated meat are Safeway, SuperTarget and WalMart.

"Michael Doyle, director of the Center for Food Safety at the University of Georgia, says one study found that when meat in modified packages that included carbon monoxide was stored at 10 degrees above the proper temperature, salmonella grew more easily."

(Source: The Consumerist, 23 February 2006, <http://www.consumerist.com/consumer/butchers/storebought-meats-dosed-to-look-red-156237.php>)

DEPLETED URANIUM FROM GULF WAR II DETECTED IN ATMOSPHERE AND AIR FILTERS IN BRITAIN

The UK *Sunday Times* Online (19 February) reported on a shocking scientific study authored by British scientists Dr Chris Busby and Saoirse Morgan: "Did the Use of Uranium Weapons in Gulf War 2 result in Contamination of Europe? Evidence from the measurements of the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), Aldermaston, Berkshire, UK". The highest levels of depleted uranium ever measured in the atmosphere in Britain were transported on air currents from the Middle East and Central Asia. Of special significance were those from the Tora Bora bombing in Afghanistan in 2001, and the "Shock and Awe" bombing during Gulf War II in Iraq in 2003.

The Atomic Weapons Establishment was established years ago to measure radioactive emissions from British nuclear power plants and atomic weapons facilities. Three years ago it was taken over by Halliburton, which refused at first to release air monitoring data, as required by law, to Dr Busby. An international expert on low-level radiation, Busby serves as an official adviser on several British government committees, and co-authored an independent report on low-level radiation with 45 scientists, the European Committee on Radiation Risk (ECRR), for the European Parliament. He was finally able to get Aldermaston air monitoring data from Halliburton/AWE by filing a Freedom of Information request using a new British law which became effective on 1 January 2005—but still the data for 2003 were missing. He eventually obtained the 2003 data from the Defence Procurement Agency.

The fact that the air monitoring data was circulated by Halliburton/AWE to the Defence Procurement Agency implies that it was considered to be relevant, and that Dr Busby was stonewalled because Halliburton/AWE clearly recognised that it was a serious enough matter to justify a government interpretation of the results, and official decisions had to be made about what the data would show and their political implications for the military.

In a similar circumstance in 1992, Major Doug Rokke, the director of the US Army Depleted Uranium Cleanup Project after Gulf War I, was ordered by a US Army general to write a no-bid contract, "Depleted Uranium, Contaminated Equipment, and Facilities Recovery Plan Outline", for the procedures for cleaning up Kuwait, including depleted uranium, for Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR), a subsidiary of Halliburton. The contract/proposal was passed through Madeleine Albright, the secretary of state, to the Emirate of Kuwait, which considered the terms and then hired KBR for the cleanup.

Aldermaston is one of many nuclear facilities throughout Europe that regularly monitor levels of radiation transported by atmospheric sand and dust storms or air currents from radiation sources in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. After the "Shock and Awe" campaign in Iraq in 2003, very fine particles of depleted uranium were captured with larger sand and dust particles in filters in Britain. These particles travelled in seven to nine days from Iraqi battlefields as far as 2,400 miles away. The radiation measured in the atmosphere quadrupled within a few weeks of the beginning of the 2003 campaign, and at one of the five monitoring locations the levels twice required an official alert to the British Environment Agency.

In addition to depleted uranium data gathered in previous studies on Kosovo and Bosnia by Dr Busby, the Aldermaston air monitoring data provide a continuous record of depleted uranium levels in Britain from other recent wars.

Extensive video news footage of the 2003 Iraq war, including Fallujah in 2004, provides irrefutable documented evidence that the US has unethically and illegally used depleted uranium munitions on cities and other civilian populations. These military actions are in direct violation not only of international conventions but also of US military law because the US is a signatory to The Hague and Geneva Conventions and the 1925 Geneva Gas Protocol. Depleted uranium weaponry meets the definition of a weapon of mass destruction (WMD) in two out of three categories under US Code Title 50, Chapter 40 Section 2302.

"This research shows that rather than remaining near the target as claimed by the military, depleted uranium weapons contaminate both locals and whole populations hundreds to thousands of miles away," Dr Busby said.

(Sources: "The Queen's Death Star" by Leuren Moret, 26 February 2006; The Sunday Times Online, UK, 19 February 2006)